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The present invention provides systems and methods for selectively applying electrical energy to a target location within a patient's body, particularly including tissue in the spine. The present invention applies high frequency (RF) electrical energy to one or more electrode terminals in the presence of electrically conductive fluid to contract collagen fibers within the tissue structures. In one aspect of the invention, a system and method is provided for treating herniated or swollen discs within a patient's spine by applying sufficient electrical energy to the disc tissue to contract or shrink the collagen fibers within the nucleus pulposus. This causes the pulposis to shrink and withdraw from its impingement on the spinal nerve.

[illegible]